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Robin Hill: There's only one sky, exhibition catalog essay by Julia Couzens

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. There's only one sky.

ROBIN HILL

# Generous not knowing

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By JULIA COUZENS

SACRAMENTO — Like a single letter that begins a word which builds a sentence to launch a novel, the expansive installations of Robin Hill begin with tiny moments plucked from her unfolding day. For three decades she has collected, molded, duplicated, organized, stacked and indexed what nature sheds and culture distributes, choosing and sorting according to the most intimate and necessary inclinations of her own life.

Gallery-spanning odes to temporal permanence and change are assembled from limestone rock, gathered from 35 years of beach walks along the Cape Breton coast in Nova Scotia. Orange peels, plastic bags and torn paper are set on light sensitized paper to create a library of elegant and inexplicably tender cyanotypes. Isolated from their quotidian origins, these castoffs are elevated to visual haiku, becoming ruminations on what is worthy and what is beautiful. Hill's unexpected, even playful conceptual grafts and her attentive eye, alert to wit, found poetry, and formal refinement, cause us to ponder what is both valuable knowing and valuable not knowing—speculations sometimes unsettling and disorienting, but necessary to our sustainable and existential welfare.

For the last five years Hill has been harvesting from journalism's culture, collecting words and phrases from the New York

Times, a literal exercise in cut-and-paste semiotics. Like a newsprint beach comber, Hill scans the paper for nuggets of text that conjure reverie or trigger cognitive detours. Cutting out little slivers of newsprint, she pastes the words or phrases onto new sheets of paper, duplicates them on sticker labels, or editions them in greatly amplified inkjet prints. Isolated from their original contexts and removed from their intended information systems the phrases are liberated from meaning and are free to be reassigned new intentions and motives. Or not.

The first iteration of this project was shown in 2017 as a single piece, *Weighing Papers*, in a solo show at Lennon-Weinberg in New York. Hill pasted the individual snippets of text on translucent paper used by chemists for weighing elements, then pinned the tiny, post-it sized paper squares onto a seven-foot, circular canvas in a delicate, random array. Hill's second version upped the conceptual ante in her performative collaboration with Los Angeles artists, writers, and curators. Extracting not just the text from its context, she also stepped back from curating its reassignment. The collaborators or co-curators were given a stack of about 25 stickers to randomly affix and photograph in locations throughout L.A., then post with the hashtag *#dispersedtransmissions* on the social media platform, Instagram. Hill subsequently posted the photos as *Dispersed Transmissions*, her 2018 show with the online gallery Another Year in L.A.

The conceptual brilliance of *Dispersed Transmissions* is to be found in the circulation of extracted, spliced, and reconstituted meaning released into the entropic social cosmos. But to the extent that her collaborators stick little words on such things as lampposts, dangling price tags, exposed





plumbing, and beer bottles, Hill embeds her disembodied text into the shifting landscape of L.A. These juxtapositions create new architecture constructed from the scaffolding of forgotten narratives, syncing up the past with the evergreen present.

*There's only one sky* is Hill's third and most ambitious deployment of what is now an archive of over 400 newspaper clippings. The exhibition assembles some 300 inkjet prints in floor-to-ceiling grids that sheath the gallery walls. For all the work's lean physicality—unframed sheets of paper—the exhibition is a resplendent framing of unlimited space, rich in the opportunity for reflecting, contemplating, pondering, remembering, rethinking, musing, and altogether engrossing woolgathering. Nothing is granted status, nothing is contaminated with veiled inferences or hints. All parts are equal, capable of moving in any direction. Hill offers us three - or four - word stepping stones into the continuous loop of creative space. Our desire for answers, for stories, and for our abiding need to make sense is met with ambiguity's

existential generosity where nothing lasts longer than a question.

Hill is consistently adroit in creating wholes greater than the sums of their parts. *There's only one sky* is a breathtaking constellation of found poetry. We move through galaxies of words that orbit like comets through our consciousness. When we don't know, we are given the chance to go farther and deeper.

Not knowing is pivotal to art. It is the bedrock of all creative acts.

*flower forever in the brilliant ...*

sheep roam g



grasslands outside

the idea of casting

wrapped around a renegade core.



wherever the truth takes us

This is like panning for gold



veiled or not-so-veiled

curiosity is som



ething we feed on.

it sprouts an adverb



unravel the circumstances

until the light strikes it a certain way,"



chairs sit on a concert stage.

see who needs help.

start from scratch.

one is, frankly, in a hall of mirrors.”

a fabulous place to wander

deeper into the pools

“I definitely believe

wade through a deluge

whipped into a furor

our need for space,”

This asymmetry in risk

“Isn’t it so beautiful out here?”



You see colors and clouds,

everything is up

daring and exposed, but proud,”

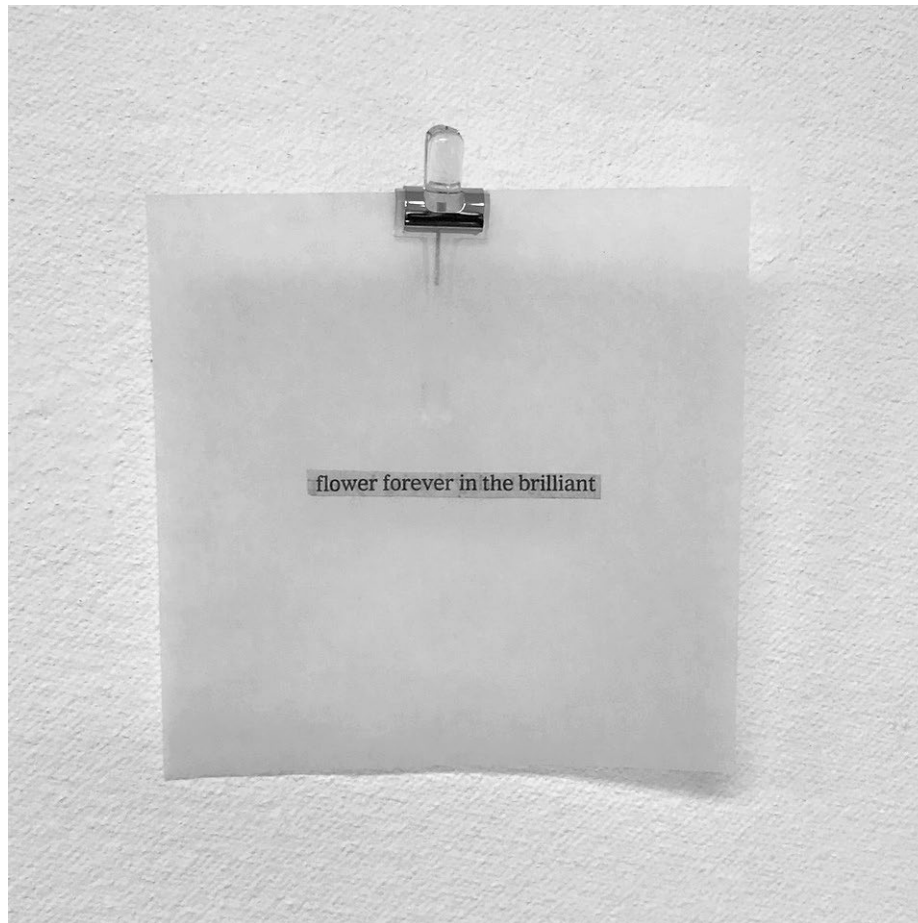
Tea was always kept hot

“Forever, till it’s no more fun.”

morph things to your ear







This catalog was published on the occasion of the exhibition:

Robin Hill: *There's only one sky*  
artspace 1616  
February 8 - February 29, 2020  
1616 Del Paso Boulevard  
Sacramento, CA 95815

Previous iterations of this project include:

Robin Hill: *There Was*  
March 9 - April 22, 2017  
Lennon, Weinberg, Inc.  
514 West 25 Street  
New York, NY 10001

and

Robin Hill: *Dispersed Transmissions*  
July 1 - August 31, 2018  
[www.anotheryearinla.com](http://www.anotheryearinla.com)

To see images visit: [www.robin-hill.net](http://www.robin-hill.net)

ESSAY: *Generous not Knowing*, by Julia Couzens

Julia Couzens is a textile-based artist whose constructions take shape between the disciplines of craft, decorative art, and the expressive character of abstract painting and sculpture. She has created distinct bodies of work in drawing, painting, sculpture, and text-based installation. Couzens has written articles for *The Sacramento Bee*, *Two Coats of Paint*, and *Ceramics: Art and Perception* as well as essays for artist catalogues and brochures. Since 2014 she has been a contributing writer to [squarecylinder.com](http://squarecylinder.com).

CATALOG DESIGN: Lisa Ekström

Artist-designer Lisa Ekström lives and works in Santa Cruz, California. Raised in a family of architects, painters, musicians, and weavers, she was the only second grader in her class who knew what "Helvetica" was.

PHOTOGRAPHY: Robin Hill, Richard Gilles (artspace 1616 installation image), Lisa Oxley ("stuck in place", Tujunga, CA)

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There's only one sky.